

LIKE HUMANS, ANIMALS TOO HAVE A RIGHT TO MIGRATE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Twenty seven years after a tiger [was last sighted in the Dang district of Gujarat](#), a big cat (5-7 years old) was spotted in the state's Mahisagar district on February 12. With this sighting, Gujarat now has the unique distinction of being home to both Asiatic Lions as well as a Bengal Tiger, which is listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List since 2008.

The surprise appearance of a tiger has raised a few questions: First, where has this tiger come from? Second, can it coexist with lions? And third, what happens if they come face to face? "We can only speculate what is likely to happen... We know that lions are stronger in a group against an adversary while the tiger is a solitary animal. Between both cats, the tiger is definitely stronger," Mumbai-based lion researcher, Meena Venkataraman, told Down To Earth. On the first question, Times of India reported that after seeing the photos of the big cat's stripes, forest officials of the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh have claimed that the tiger is from their zone.

If this claim is correct, then the tiger must have trekked almost 300 km of densely populated areas to reach Gujarat. It must have, forest officials claim, survived on livestock and wild animals. In that case, this tiger has been extremely lucky to avoid any conflict with humans during its long journey. But not all big cats are so lucky; and, therefore, measures must be taken to ensure that animals that move from one area to another get secure and safe passage.

This means that animal corridors and buffer zones are maintained across the country, and that infrastructure development around forest areas such as roads, railways and canals take into account that animals, too, have a right to move from one part to another, and that such structures must not impede their movement.

One of the recommendations of the ministry of environment and forests on guidelines for roads in protected areas says, "Wherever possible, natural animal crossings existing across roads should be retained or encouraged. For instance, overlapping tree canopy in closed canopy evergreen/semi evergreen forests is an essential attribute for the movement of arboreal species. Passage to water holes and daily movements of animals must also be safeguarded". Where natural passes are not possible, it adds, there should be well designed tunnels, culverts, and pipes for a wide range of terrestrial and aquatic species.

For the moment, however, the Gujarat forest department has its work cut out. It needs to keep a strict vigil on the movement of the tiger and also sensitise the local population about the tiger's movements and the need to protect it.

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